

Combat Camera

New Hampshire National Guard's 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment gives and receives real-world media training at National Training Center



Spec. Kathleen Briere, a soldier with the 114th MPAD, interviews a 2nd BCT soldier during an “Iraqi demonstration” inside the box at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Calif. during a July rotation. (Photo 114th MPAD)

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FORT IRWIN, CA – Eleven soldiers of the New Hampshire Army National Guard's 114th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment are doing their part to support the ongoing efforts of the global war on terrorism. For their annual two-week training, the soldiers are helping to prepare the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (2nd BCT), from Fort Carson, Colo. for its upcoming deployment to Iraq.

The training is taking place at the National Training Center, NTC, the Army's elite training site, designed especially to prepare units for deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. And by all accounts, it's working.

“We've actually had cases of combat stress,” said John Wagstaffe, from the Fort Irwin Public Affairs Office. Soldiers that have been to Iraq often have flashbacks to their deployments, he said. Even the smells from the mock villages, set up to replicate what the units might encounter in Iraq, are authentic.

For their rotation through NTC, the soldiers of the 114th are functioning in a dual capacity, providing real news coverage for the 2nd BCT as they prepare for their deployment, and assisting the 2nd BCT with the role playing scenarios.

The unit, made up of Photo Journalists and Broadcast Journalists, is trained to tell the Army story and provide guidance and assistance to commanders in dealing with civilian media.

In today's news-hungry world, the mission of Army Public Affairs has never been more important, according to Maj. Jerome S. Loring of Belmont, commander of the 114th.

"Balancing the sometimes-negative press is a critical mission of the public affairs unit," Loring said. "This was illustrated in an event that took place with the 2nd BCT."

In a mock incident outside the 2nd BCT command tent, several Iraqis were shot when a demonstration turned violent. Sgt. Luke Koladish of Portsmouth, a photojournalist with the 114th, was there to document the scene with his camera.

"When I arrived on the scene the first thing I heard was the chanting from the crowd of about 35," Koladish said. "The second thing I noticed was that there were American and Iraqi casualties on the ground."

"There was a lot of yelling," said Koladish, who served as an infantryman in Iraq in 2004. "The confusion was typical to situations that I saw in Iraq, but we never had anything like this right in our compound."

To simulate the ever-present media in Iraq, the International News Network (INN) was there to capture the event.

Spec. Kathleen Briere from Manchester, another Photojournalist with the 114th, was covering the event and also captured several important images.

"It was definitely chaotic when we got there," said Briere. "I thought that the soldiers responded quickly and appropriately. I was really impressed with the medics who treated not only the Americans but the Iraqi demonstrators as well. They were all equally important."

Briere was impressed by how the situation was resolved, with negotiations back and forth. When it was over, the demonstrator hugged the American officer and others as well.

"It was clear," said Briere, "that the Iraqis felt their message had been received and that we cared about their concerns."

The 114th is providing real life media assistance to the 2nd BCT as well. The unit videotaped a memorial service for a young 2nd BCT soldier who was recently killed, so that the family, who could not be there, would have the opportunity to share in the solemn moment.

In addition, the 114th is providing pictures, stories, and video to local and national media outlets to tell the story of the 2nd BCT as they prepare to deploy to Iraq.

In the coming week members of the 114th, working with the full-time Public Affairs Office at Fort Irwin, will have the opportunity to escort media next week with a visit from the State Department. The unit will have the opportunity to work with media representatives from France, Sweden, Spain, Germany and the United States.

"It's a great opportunity for the unit," said Master Sgt. Mike Daigle of Andover, the senior NCIOC for the detachment.

"The soldiers of the 114th have only two weeks to make an impact," said Loring, "but they have already made a lasting impression on the soldiers and leadership of the 2nd BCT and gladly endure the heat and dust of the California desert to do their part to bring peace and stability to the people of Iraq and security to the American people."